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BIOME

National Museum of Natural Sciences

Vol: 1:2

Sheer Drop — Mountain Goats

Beauty and the Beasts

Imagine being able to capture and keep with you those moments in nature when the world suddenly stops and you are let into the mystery of life of another creature. Imagine being able to experience again and again the thrill of sighting a deer poised at the edge of a clearing; the glimpse of a hawk circling over a golden field in the lazy heat of a summer evening; or the sudden thunder of a grouse in the fall woods. These special moments are what inspire many of us to become naturalists, hikers, nature-lovers; they are what keep us coming back for more.

Today, many people are discovering that they can keep those moments alive by surrounding themselves with art that captures the essence of the wilderness. Names of Canadian wildlife artists like Bateman, McLean, Lansdowne, Loates, and Shortt are becoming known to art critics and the general public alike. And business is booming in wildlife paintings. Whereas once you had to scour the lobbies of hunting lodges to find animals portrayed in the wild, today originals worth thousands of dollars hang in museums and the homes of many art collectors.

Although animals have been the subject of art since Paleolithic man decorated cave walls in southern France some 20,000 years ago, wildlife art has not always been popular or prevalent in the West. For many centuries in Europe wildlife was not considered a subject worthy of great art. Most of the wild animals that did find their way into paintings were either dead and strung up beside a plate of fruit, or supporting actors in the glorification of human deeds. Only since the 19th century has it become respectable to paint wild animals for their own merit. As the science of documenting and classifying the natural world blossomed, artists who portrayed only wildlife emerged. And gradually, wildlife art gained recognition within the artistic community.

Museums of natural history have always had a special interest in the wildlife artist. In North America the naturalist-turned-artist formed the very backbone of the movement to document the New World's wilderness, and was aligned closely with the scientific community. Even Audubon, hailed as the dean of wildlife art, considered himself a naturalist first and an artist second.

Today, natural history museums are often the first to exhibit new artists' work as they struggle for acceptance by the arts establishment. Wildlife illustration, so necessary in science museums and books, is the bread-and-butter of many nature artists. And, as the conservation ethic grows, artists who might have hunted for their own specimens in the past rely on museums and their collections for reference to fine details they cannot see in the field.

The National Museum of Natural Sciences has had a history of supporting and promoting wildlife art. In the early 1970s the Museum began to collect art with a wilderness theme for display purposes. The collection now numbers over 700 pieces and includes work by wildlife artists Jean-Luc Grondin and Ghislain Lefebvre, sculptures by Bob Kerr and David Wong, as well as a large collection of carved duck decoys.

In 1973, in cooperation with the Canadian Nature Federation, the National Museum of Natural Sciences mounted the first Canadian Nature Art exhibition, a juried competition open to any Canadian artist or sculptor who portrays wildlife, which re-

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Bateman spends hours outdoors, sketching wild creatures and their habitats. Back in his studio he starts by doing a rough study on a small panel. When he is satisfied with the composition of his sketch, he begins his final work, using bold strokes to establish the general idea of the painting, and making many changes as he progresses. He uses acrylics to render a sharply defined image, then glazes over the initial brushstrokes with thin washes of colour.

Robert Bateman: Music for the Eye

In the artistic community, where for centuries wildlife was not considered a respectable subject for art and nature artists were ignored as mere illustrators, it takes a great painter to stand up against the biases of time and be recognized.

Robert Bateman is just such a painter. Chosen in 1980 as American Artist of the Year, Bateman has won international acclaim for his powerful portrayals of wildlife. He paints not just animals and birds, but the actors of the natural world on a cosmic stage. Every detail is perfect, from the downy fur of a baby cottontail frozen against the protective colouring of last fall's leaves, to the musculature of a wildebeest being torn apart by a pride of lions. Every creature is in its ecological context, and details of the environment are portrayed with the same care and attention as the creatures themselves. But more than that, Bateman's paintings have a spiritual presence as well as a vitality and urgency that challenge the viewer. We are drawn into his pictures — we soar amidst the thunderclouds with a solitary golden eagle, we catch our breath as a barn owl suddenly flies by the open door of an ancient church.

Our response is no accident — although Bateman's love of the wild is what inspires his paintings, he is also a master of composition. He creates his paintings around a theme and uses every element to enhance his statement. His ability to depict the wild in exquisite detail and his skill in using shapes, colours, textures and space to enforce his vision are testimony to a dogged pursuit of two interests that must at times have seemed hopelessly incompatible.

Robert Bateman was born in Toronto in 1930. He developed an early interest in art and in wildlife — by the age of 12 he had started his first bird book and was sketching for the Junior Field Naturalists' Club at the Royal Ontario Museum. As a teenager, on summer jobs at Algonquin Park, he carried a sketchbook everywhere. At university he majored in geography and attended art classes, gradually becoming acquainted with the work of international artists.

After graduation his love of art took him to the studios and galleries of Europe, and his love of the outdoors took him around the world, before he settled down to teach art and geography in southern Ontario.

His own art progressed through various phases in the 50s and 60s as he experimented with the styles of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne and Picasso. He finally settled into a period of abstract painting, but was never entirely comfortable working without recognizable subjects. Then, in 1963, he saw an exhibit by American realist Andrew Wyeth in Buffalo. For Bateman it was a breakthrough. At last he saw a way to paint the

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NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF CANADA
MUSÉES NATIONAUX DU CANADA

EDITORIAL

With BIOME barely six months old, we have decided in this second issue to tackle the difficult subject of art and nature, the artistic representation of flora and fauna in their natural environment. You might wonder what led us to this decision.

Basically, our choice stems from our constant exposure to the numerous works of art exhibited in the museum, and from our almost continuous use of illustrations dealing with the natural sciences.

For about ten years, our museum has been collecting the works of nationally and internationally recognized nature artists and has been encouraging promising newcomers to this field. We also borrow provincial, national and foreign works and collections. The regular exhibits that result from these efforts have caused many of us to develop, if not an outright passion, then at least a definite interest in this form of visual artistic expression. It has also given us a certain expertise which — for the purposes of this publication — has been augmented by helpful advice from the staff of the National Gallery and the Exhibits Section of the National Museum of Natural Sciences.

In the course of our classification, identification and interpretation activities, museum staff are confronted daily with the precise, elegant and minutely detailed drawings of nature illustrators.

Many of our renowned nature artists began as illustrators. Stimulated by the precision of line and colour and by the desire to capture and reproduce movement, they subsequently sought to give free rein to their inspiration. Many chose painting as a means of expression, and by experimenting and developing their talent, freed themselves from the restrictions of working "to order" and from the limited role of providing "support" for a text.

The great nature artists, together with the many others who have retained the more "humble" role of illustrating publications or museum dioramas, have done much to help the general public discover and understand the environment. They have been important elements in creating an ecological awareness in our younger generations.

In this, the second issue of BIOME, we wish to honour these artists, and also to give you a broad view of the past and present in nature art.

Koel

Elizabeth Gwillim had an obvious scientific as well as artistic interest in her birds. On the back of some of her works are notes in her own hand, with exact measurements of size and weight, colouration, sexual differences, habits and habitat of the birds.

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Editor-in-Chief:
Dr. Elisabeth Marsollier

Editor/Writer:
Carol Thiessen

Acknowledgements:
Stephen Brathwaite
Michel Christensen
Russell A. Fink
Doug Hoy
Lorna Johnson
David Lank
Jim McLaughlin
Arnet Sheppard
Neil Sneyd
Allan Walkinshaw
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M.F. Feheley Arts Company Ltd
Design and Technical Services NMC

Graphic Design:
Danielle Dupont

Illustrations:
Gilles Huneault
Kiyomi Shoyama

NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF NATURAL SCIENCES

NATIONAL MUSEUMS
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BIOME
National Museum of Natural Sciences
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0M8

Forgotten Artist Featured

To many, the name of John James Audubon is synonomous with nature art. Called the dean of wildlife art, he is credited with being the first to paint life-size birds in their proper ecological settings. Yet a recent discovery of a collection of paintings lying almost unnoticed at McGill University's Blacker-Wood Library has changed that distinction for all time.

More than two decades before Audubon exhibited his work in England, an unknown Georgian lady living in India was painting life-size portraits of birds in their habitats. Elizabeth Gwillim, wife of a British official, moved to Madras, India in 1801 when her husband was appointed Supreme Court Judge. Little is known about her life, but while living there until her death in 1807, she painted an unknown number of watercolours of birds in the area.

In itself, this is not astonishing. The study of natural history and watercolour painting were favourite pastimes of many Georgian ladies and gentlemen, especially in India where, as one writer put it, there were "few methods for employment of the softer sex". Women of the 18th and 19th centuries were encouraged to draw, to illustrate their diaries and to paint flowers to while away the time. But the watercolours of Elizabeth Gwillim are more than just casual drawings of an idle hand. Her work shows artistic talent, a sense of purpose and an intimate understanding of her subjects that was well ahead of her time.

The natural poses of her birds and details of the settings in which they are placed indicate that she spent a great deal of time in the field observing the behaviour and habits of birds. Terry Shortt, one of the world's most accomplished bird artists, points out that no artist before 1800 had shown the understanding of feather arrangement and pattern exhibited by Lady Gwillim. He adds there can be no doubt that she worked from living or freshly killed specimens to achieve such accuracy of colour in the beak, eyes, wattles, and feet. These soft parts of birds lose their colour soon after death, a detail that painters who use dead specimens, as was customary in her time, often overlook.

Purple Heron

The achievements of Elizabeth Gwillim are remarkable. But the fact that she is just beginning to take her place in the history of wildlife art is a legacy of the society she lived in. The 18th and 19th centuries were very much a man's world. Although women were expected to draw for recreation, it was not considered proper to pursue a professional artistic career. Even if it had been practical for Gwillim to publish her work from her home in India, it would have been extremely difficult for her to find financial backing. Whereas Audubon was able to produce *Birds of America*, Lady Gwillim remained in obscurity.

Now, some 175 years later, a travelling exhibit of 60 of Elizabeth Gwillim's paintings, organized by the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, will finally give her some of the recognition she deserves.

Artists who are interested in submitting works for Canadian Nature Art exhibitions should send their name and address to:

Canadian Nature Federation
75 Albert Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 6G1

Nature Art Comes of Age

In the mid-19th century, artist Joseph Wolf commented: "If you paint a dead linnet or red poll, it is admissible at the Royal Academy. If you paint it alive, it is a transcript of an object of Natural History . . . unfit for exhibition". Such was the place of wildlife art in his time. Even today, when subject matter is said to be unimportant to the value of art, many painters who portray only wild animals and birds struggle to be taken seriously by the arts establishment. The term wildlife art itself denotes a kind of subclass, something that is not quite legitimate and must be qualified.

To understand the place of nature painting in the arts community today we must look at how it has evolved since very early times. And in doing so, we find that wildlife art has been born of two very different traditions.

Although wild animals were probably the first subjects ever portrayed by ancient artists, the growth of civilization did little to encourage this expression. As the western world developed, people gradually drew away from close contact with wild nature. Artists, the visual recorders of history, were understandably at the beck and call of their patrons, who demanded paintings depicting wars, processions, and the glorification of empires. Medieval artists did paint animals but under the influence of the Catholic church they were endowed with human characteristics, mostly bad, and used in the moralizing tales of the bestiaries.

Renaissance curiosity stimulated an advance of knowledge in many areas, including natural history. Indeed, the mid-1500s saw the publication of the first new natural history since 79 A.D.! But as science developed, the rift between the humanities and sciences became greater and greater. The humanities, including artists, were concerned with contemplating and glorifying God's image; science devoted itself to the orderly investigation and classification of the universe. Some of the great artists did portray animals as accessories to man or God, but their treatment of wild creatures was usually awful.

While the mainstream of art moved away from science, an artistic spirit nevertheless remained in some scientists. As the systematic classification and documentation of nature developed, wildlife illustration became an important adjunct. Science was a hard taskmaster, however. It required details, minutiae and an exactness of measurement that was the very antithesis of artistic treatment. Most wildlife illustrators had little or no formal art training and the majority were not able to rise above the limiting demands of their profession. But a few in every generation transcended taxonomic conventions and presented pleasing as well as accurate subjects. It is to these naturalist-artists that we owe another tradition of wildlife art.

From the publication in 1555 of Gesner's ornithology, with its crude woodcuts of both mythical and real creatures, it is a long way to the birds of John James Audubon. For over two centuries animal art developed slowly but steadily, along with improvements in engraving, hand-colouring and attempts to infuse subjects with life. But for the most part, the creatures remained static.

It was not until Audubon first displayed his paintings of North American birds at the Royal Institute in Edinburgh in 1827, that a revolution was sparked in animal art. His birds were not only ornithologically correct, they were also, to a degree never before achieved, uncannily alive. Here were birds placed for the first time in their ecological settings and actually doing something.

These innovations were not easily accomplished. Audubon spent many hours observing birds in the field. He had tried in vain to give his drawings of dead specimens the same kind of vitality he saw outdoors, until finally he hit on a method of wiring freshly killed birds to a grid in the pose he wanted and then transferring them to his drawing paper. He drew his birds life-size (even the Flamingo and Whooping Crane), and his drawings had a power that captivated his audience.

With the publication of his monumental *Birds of America*, Audubon set the stage for a golden age of wildlife illustration. He had broken new ground — and as the public demanded more art and less illustration, the next century and a half produced a number of outstanding wildlife artists: Archibald Thorburn and Joseph Wolf in England; Francis Lee Jacques and Louis Agassiz Fuertes in the United States; Léo-Paul Robert in Switzerland; Wilhelm Kuhnert in Germany; Bruno Liljefors in Sweden; Carl Rungius and Allan Brooks in Canada. All have provided inspiration for our modern artists.

Today, wildlife art has come of age. Its popularity is spreading beyond the support of scientists, naturalists and hunters, to the public at large. As wildlife artists come out from hiding, the split between the arts and sciences, in this area at least, shows signs of mending.

Beauty and the Beasts

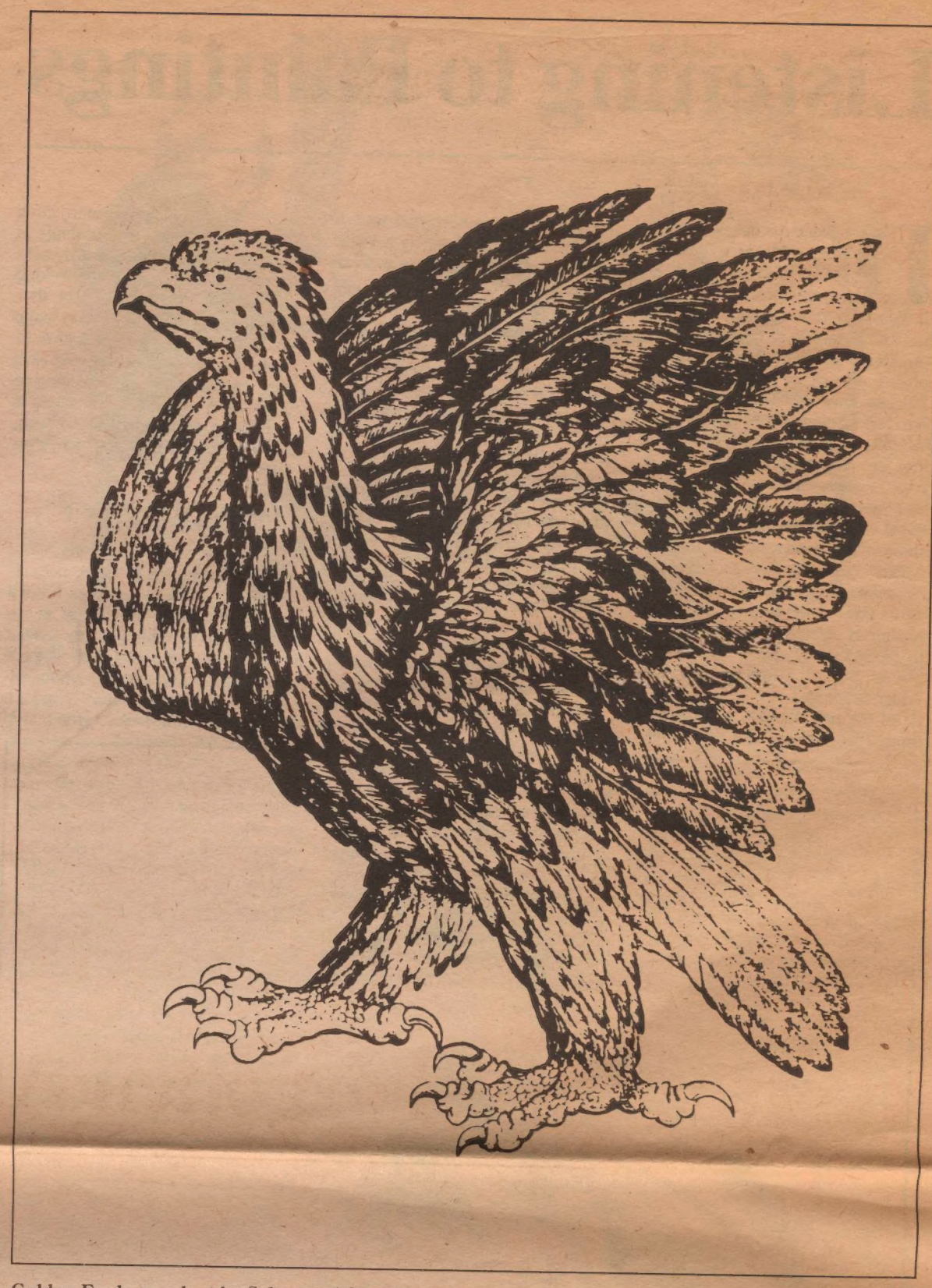
Continued

sults in the selection of 35-40 works for a travelling exhibition. Canadian Nature Art exhibits have continued every year or two until today, and an international show is now being planned.

In 1981-82 the National Museum of Natural Sciences is promoting wildlife art with exhibits of Robert Bateman, Frank de Matteis, David Wong, and the 18th century artist, Lady Elizabeth Gwillim. Other nature artists whose exhibits are now travelling with the museum include James Fenwick Lansdowne, Allan Brooks, Eli Kish and Dagny Tande Lid.

For some, the categorization of wildlife art is misleading. They maintain that good art is good art regardless of its subject and that natural history museums should not be setting artistic standards for the community. Yet wildlife as a subject for art is enjoying an unparalleled boom today. Perhaps because it bridges the arts and sciences, too often wildlife art sits uneasily in both. Zoologists deplore the artist who cannot depict wilderness creatures with rigorous scientific accuracy, while many art critics dismiss wildlife art as too representational and the artists as simply illustrators.

Yet great wildlife art transcends this distinction between art and science. It makes a statement at once spiritual and worldly, that captures the essence of the wild with the eye of a naturalist and the poetry and skill of an artist.



Golden Eagle woodcut by Schan and Oberreiter 18

Conrad Gesner's *Historia Animalium*, published in 1555, marked the first new scientific treatment of animals in over five centuries. Although his folios still contained details of mythical beasts and sea monsters, they also included some illustrations and excellent descriptions of hundreds of real mammals and birds. The woodcuts, executed by Lucas Schan and Franz Oberreiter, were not completely accurate, but were nonetheless instantly recognizable.

John James Audubon was the first published nature artist to place animals and birds in their proper ecological settings. His four-volume *Birds of America*, produced between 1827 and 1838, was the largest most sumptuous colour plate book ever published, containing 435 double elephant folio plates that measured ¾ metres by 1 metre. Subscribers paid the then enormous price of $1000 to own these huge books. A complete set was reported to have sold recently for $750,000.

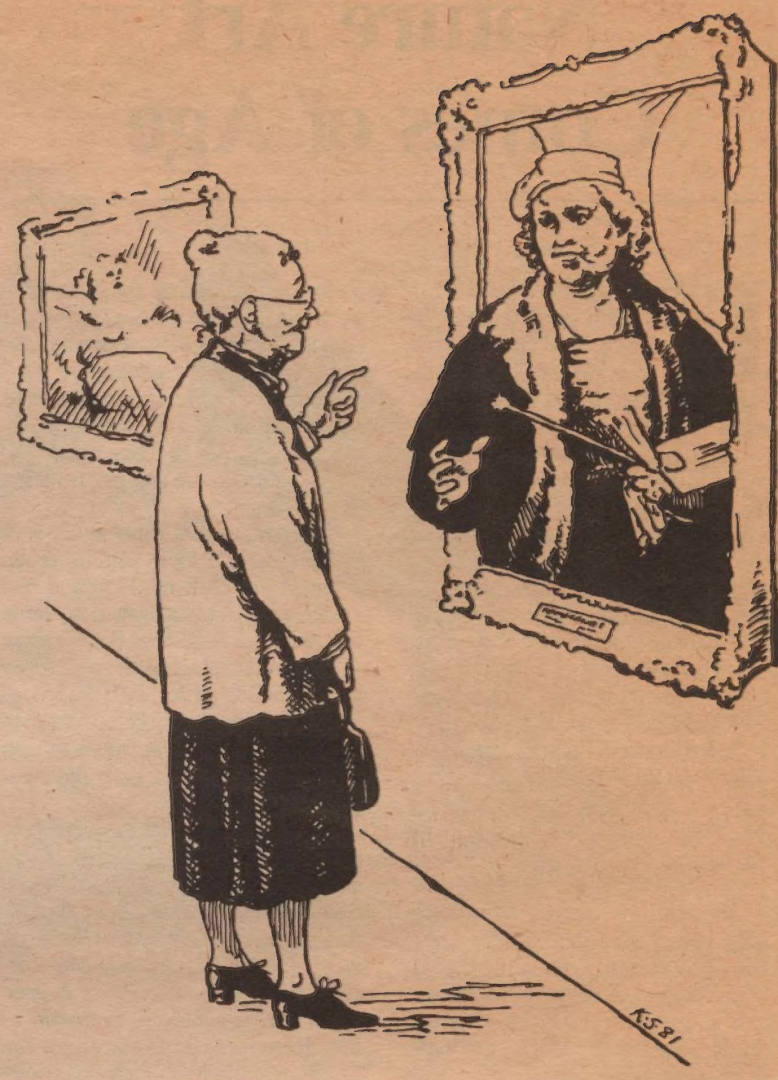
Listening to Paintings

Do paintings speak to you? Does each one tell you its story in clear tones of colour, form and line? Or do you sometimes feel that if good art has a statement to make, then you must be deaf? Maybe you've looked at a lot of nature paintings and you have an idea of what you like, but when it comes to "Art" you feel like you're treading on pretty thin ice. You'd just as soon buy a print of a kingfisher you fell in love with because you admire the fine detail — and stay out of the debate about what's good art and what isn't.

"Art" does not have to be intimidating or mysterious. With a bit of effort you can develop confidence in looking at paintings, not necessarily to become an expert, but for the sheer joy of appreciating and understanding.

As the title implies, a painting is more than just colours on canvas, yet too often it is seen that way. If you look instead at art as a visual dialogue, you become more aware of the presence of the artist — and realize that you have a part to play in the communication process too. Through painting, the artist seeks to express something, a way of looking at the world perhaps, or something about colour or the materials themselves. He or she brings to the painting this desire to express, as well as many other things — a unique way of seeing, the skill and ability to use materials, the artistic conventions of the time, even the history of art through the ages.

You cannot change what the artist brings to a painting. But you can change what you bring to your side of the visual dialogue. Learning the language of paintings does not have to mean taking art history or appreciation courses, although if you're so inclined it helps to have a broader perspective. It can mean such things as exploring the paintings of your favourite wildife artist by asking questions instead of just looking and judging; or *seeing* for the first time the myriad of hues that make up the Blue Jays in your backyard; or exploring and expressing your own view of the world by beginning to draw for fun. What it will mean is increasing your visual awareness, learning to see in ways you never knew.



LOOKING AT PAINTINGS

The first step in learning about what the artist has to say is, not surprisingly, to look at paintings. Even if you're interested specifically in nature art, to develop your eye try not to limit yourself. Look at **all** kinds of art. Look everywhere — go to galleries, museums, look through books, go to libraries. Don't stop looking. When you think you've exhausted all the possibilities in your area, go again. Do the paintings that first appealed to you still move you? Don't be afraid to respond emotionally to a painting — often you hear what the artist is expressing very well without the message ever intruding into your verbal consciousness.

Sometimes it helps to ask yourself a few simple questions when you look at a painting. Is there a dominant mood in this painting? What word or words come to mind when you first look at it? Is there a dominant colour? Artists and psychologists have learned that colours reflect and influence us. Does the artist use the colour to create a mood? Look closely at the painting to see the use of colour and the artist's brushwork. For this you will need to see the original, and at this point it's worth noticing the significant difference between a painting and a reproduction.

If you're interested in nature artists, look through back issues of *Nature Canada* and *International Wildlife*. In recent years you will find articles about many well-known wildlife painters, including Louis Agassiz Fuertes, Manfred Schatz, George McLean, Terence Shortt, Clarence Tillenius, Jean-Luc Grondin, Robert Bateman, Bruno Liljefors, and Rien Poortvielt. When you're looking at their work, compare the styles of the European painters with those of Americans or Canadians. Do you notice a difference? Painters of different countries are influenced by different traditions and respond to *different tastes; some European* wildlife artists find the North American passion for detail in nature paintings to be quite strange considering that you rarely get close enough to an animal in the wild to see such minutiae.

Some books that suggest things to look for in all kinds of paintings are: *Art: As You See It* by Ione Bell, Karen Matison Hess and Jim Matison; and *The Many Ways of Seeing* by Janet Gaylord Moore.

THE ART OF SEEING

Li Li-Wêng, a Chinese sage of the 17th century said, "First we see the hills in the painting, then we see the

Brief Interlude by Manfred Schatz (pastel drawing)

Compare the styles of these three works. Each artist has captured the essence of his subject, yet the "language" used to express his unique vision is very different. By looking at paintings of many artists you can increase your understanding of visual language.

Great Horned Owl by J.F. Lansdowne

Bluffing Bull by Robert Bateman

painting in the hills".

In our busy adult lives we spend most of our time with blinkers on our eyes. How long has it been since you've really studied the way butter melts on your morning toast, or looked at the many colours that make up the apple you eat at lunch? We are so bombarded with visual stimuli that we have learned to preserve our sanity by editing what we see. We learn labels for things and stop looking closely at the things themselves.

Yet the essence of creativity is awareness, an ability to see the familiar in new ways, using our intellect, our senses and our emotions. An artist once asked his students to draw a specific tree. They all drew with great diligence and every student turned in a picture with graceful flowing lines that swept up and then cascaded down towards the earth. Yet when the teacher pointed it out to them, the students could see that the tree was not made up of continuous flowing branches at all, but of hundreds of short twigs growing at angles to each other which gradually, because of the force of gravity, cascaded towards the ground. To the artist this was what gave that tree its character.

Try being aware for a day of what you see and what you leave out. When you look at a scene, do you see an overall picture or does your eye focus on specifics? What elements give atmosphere to your scene? Try looking through a camera lens or cut a viewfinder out of a piece of cardboard to narrow down your field of vision. Is the mood of your scene still the same? You might also try looking at your scene from different places. Put your eyes at grass level . . . or climb a tree.

Now, have a bit of fun with your perspective on the world. Take a walk with a magnifying glass. Look carefully at such things as grass, dirt, rocks. When you get home, look closely at the cabbage you're cutting up for dinner. Have you ever really noticed the shapes, patterns, textures and colours of cabbage before? If you can find a copy of *Forms and Patterns in Nature* by Wolf Strache you will see what delight can be found in looking at mundane things from a different perspective.

Try looking at the world through pieces of different coloured glass, or glasses with tinted lenses. Does the mood change as you change colours? Remember earlier when you were identifying colours and moods in paintings. Does this exercise support some of your conclusions?

Freeman Patterson, in *Photography and the Art of Seeing*, has some very good exercises in relaxed attentiveness to the world around us. He suggests that you pick something you find visually attractive, perhaps a favourite plant, and really study it. Sit in front of it and go over it bit by bit. Look at each detail – the veins on the leaf, the petals, the hairs on a stalk. What colours make up your plant? What is its texture? If you were small enough to drive a car over the leaf, what would the ride be like? As you become absorbed in your plant you may realize with a shock that you have never really **seen** it before.

Robert Bateman talks about seeing in a National Film Board film called *Images of the Wild*.

The wrestling elephants represent a sort of mountain or land mass. I often view large animals in this way - the wrinkles and hollows resembling hills and valleys. When painting these elephants I felt like a climber, or an explorer. Every square inch of the elephant is a different texture, a different type of wrinkle or a different quality of surface.

Now that you have started to see the world again, think about how you would paint it. Just as it is important to see a subject with fresh eyes, an artist must also make decisions about what to leave out. You don't need to show every detail of a kitchen to evoke the feeling of kitchen – as Manfred Schatz points out, you don't need to draw every hair to capture the essence of a fox scratching an itch either. Suppose you wanted to interpret your cat or dog in paint. What would you focus on?

THE ARTIST WITHIN

We are all creative. When we respond to the mystery in nature or to the message communicated by a great artist, we are responding from the artist within ourselves. Frederick Franck, author of *The Zen of Seeing*, has developed a technique called seeing/drawing to help people bring out the artist within. It is a way of getting pleasure from drawing and of seeing the world with new eyes.

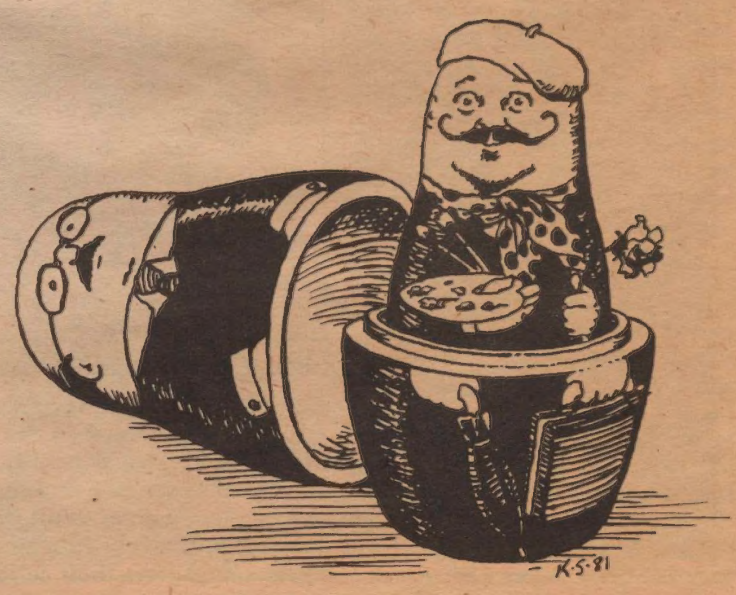
To try Franck's technique, take a pencil and paper, go outside and choose a spot to sit. Focus on something in front of you, perhaps a dandelion, a bush, a tree. Now, close your eyes and relax for a few minutes. Open your eyes again and explore visually the object you chose, as you did in the previous exercises. Take time to really **see** it. Then take your pencil and, **without taking your eyes off the object**, allow the pencil to trace what your eye sees, noting changes in textures, shapes, etc. Don't look at your hand and don't worry about whether you are drawing accurately. Keep your pencil on the paper and trace your object with a continuous line, allowing your pencil to explore and caress it as you are doing with your eyes.

The most important part of this technique is to forget about the censor in you – don't think about what you are doing, forget about erasers, don't edit and don't be afraid of failure. It is an experiment in seeing with your whole being, and if you participate fully you may find that by drawing you will learn to see in a completely different way.

Remember, above all, enjoyment is the key. As Winston Churchill, one of the more famous amateur artists of our time said,

Happy are the painters, for they shall not be lonely. Light and colour, peace and hope, will keep them company to the end, or almost the end, of the day . . . We must not be too ambitious. We cannot aspire to masterpieces. We may content ourselves with a joyride in a paint box. And for this, audacity is the only ticket.

If you want to enrich your enjoyment of nature by sketching and drawing, an excellent book to use as a guide is *Nature Drawing – A Tool for Learning* by Clare Walker Leslie (Art & Design Series, Prentice Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1980). This book is well-illustrated with sketches, drawings and paintings by a host of nature artists, and includes chapters on beginning drawing exercises, materials, methods and techniques, drawing plants and trees, drawing animals and birds, keeping a field sketchbook, and drawing landscapes. The author's style is warmly personal, and the text includes fascinating details about the natural world, as well as practical advice on sketching from nature.



Erik Dzenis

A measure of Lansdowne's talent lies in the fact that he is completely self-taught. Throughout the years, he has worked towards perfecting his art, experimenting with different materials to achieve a dramatic personal statement.

J.F. Lansdowne: Winged Visions

"There's something almost mystical about birds, perhaps because they can fly and we humans can't." The words are James Fenwick Lansdowne's, a British Columbia artist who is hailed today as one of the foremost bird painters in the world. The sentiment he expresses is shared by many, from dedicated naturalists and ornithologists to suburbanites who put out bird feeders in winter. And in past centuries the mystery of birds has inspired earthbound geniuses to create everything from poetry to air travel.

For Lansdowne, the urge to try and capture the essence of birds in paint has been a lifelong passion. "I cannot remen ber a time when I did not draw or when the birds about me were not familiar," he writes in his book, *Birds of the West Coast.*

Born in Hong Kong of British parents, he came to British Columbia at the age of three. His early childhood was secluded as he convalesced from the crippling effects of polio. When he was five his mother, herself a naturalist and talented amateur artist, taught him to use paints and to identify the birds he could see in their garden. Those early experiences aroused in him a deep sensitivity to birds and undoubtedly contributed to the lyric quality of his watercolours today.

He writes, *A hummingbird once built on a cherry bough outside our kitchen window. I was no more than five, but the birds of those days stand out clearly in my mind. It was the time they took possession of me, stamping themselves onto my mind as sharply as little Archaeopteryx is pressed into its bed of stone. Of other things, I really only remember the orange lino on the kitchen floor and that in winter everything froze, even the goldfish bowl and a kinglet in the woodshed. But I remember that hummingbird's nest.*

By the time he was 12 he had decided to make the painting of birds his career and by 14 he was spending most of his time in the field observing and sketching different species. His spare time was spent at the British Columbia Provincial Museum in Victoria studying their extensive ornithological collection, and for three summers he worked as a lab assistant dissecting and skeletonizing birds.

The rest of the story is a little like a fairy tale. Just before high school graduation he showed colour slides of his work to a guidance counsellor who sent them to Toronto for critical appraisal. They were seen by John Livingston, then executive director of the Audubon Society of Canada, who declared they were "absolutely gorgeous — too good for anyone but a trained nature artist." Livingston arranged for a one-man show at the Royal Ontario Museum and when it opened in October 1956, Lansdowne was instantly acclaimed by naturalists and art critics alike.

Success followed success, until today Lansdowne has won international recognition. His paintings have been exhibited in many cities in the world and have been used to illustrate a variety of books about the birds of North America. Lansdowne watercolours are known for their fine detail, anatomical accuracy, exquisite colouring and simplicity of design. As Roger Tory Peterson says in *Birds of the West Coast,* "It is certain that those early signs of greatness have been consummated — Lansdowne's work in its present maturity is glorious."

And what of the man who discovered the mystery of winged creatures at such an early age? Lansdowne lives a quiet life at his cottage-studio in Victoria, B.C. The trappings of worldly recognition have not changed his focus in life; just as in childhood he spends most of his time doing what he finds most intriguing, studying and painting birds.

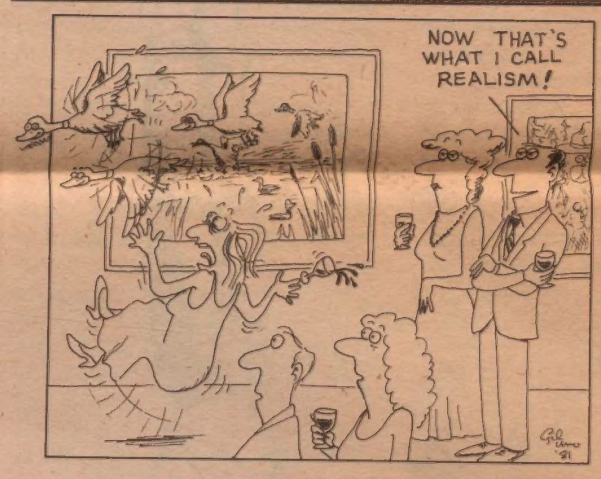
In 1980, a collection of 90 bird paintings by J.F. Lansdowne was donated to the National Museum of Natural Sciences for the people of Canada by Domtar Fine Papers Ltd. The paintings were accumulated by Domtar from 1958 to 1972 for the purpose of producing calendars. The collection is now a travelling exhibition and will be shown at art galleries and exhibition centres across the country until 1983.

Courtesy of M.F. Feheley Arts Company Ltd.

Short-Eared Owl and Sketch

Every artist has a unique way of approaching a painting. After choosing a bird subject, J.F. Lansdowne spends time studying it in the field, making rough sketches to capture an idea of what he is attempting. With a few lines he describes the essence of his vision. Back at his studio he works out the composition of his figures on the surface to be painted, and then begins the meticulous job of bringing his image to life detail by detail using gouaches (opaque watercolours) and fine sable brushes. He uses mostly watercolour paper, preferring it for the softer effect it gives to the finished painting. As a guide to the colours, textures and fine detail of the bird's feathers for which he is famous, Lansdowne closely observes a skin of the species while he paints. The bird skins, often used for study by ornithologists, are loaned to him by museums from their collections. He makes little attempt to reproduce the bird's environment in detail but deftly indicates it with a few twigs, flowers or rocks, giving his paintings a beautiful simplicity of design reminiscent of a Japanese painting.

Canadian Nature Art, a competition and exhibition sponsored by the Canadian Nature Federation and the National Museum of Natural Sciences, provides Canadian artists with a national showcase for their interpretations of the land, its plants and its animals. Frank de Matteis is just one of many artists and sculptors whose work has received this exposure. The *Mute Swan*, pictured above, was among 28 of his works recently featured in a one-man show at the Museum in Ottawa.



Robert Bateman: Music for the Eye

Continued

natural subjects so close to his heart and yet use his feeling for abstraction and composition to arrange the canvas in a way that would challenge the viewer.

In 1963 Bateman went to Nigeria as part of a teacher exchange program and began painting the wild animals of Africa. Here he had his first artistic success, as winner of an oil company's art contest. Gradually his own unique style developed, and in 1972 he was first recognized in a special exhibit at the Tryon Gallery in London, England. Since then he has been acclaimed in North America and abroad.

Bateman made the transition from teacher to full-time artist in 1975 and today he spends his time either travelling the world in search of new subjects, or painting and exploring the wooded country around his rambling self-designed home near Ontario's Bruce Trail. He sketches constantly — once, when asked how many sketches he had made in his life, he guessed about 10,000. He finds inspiration in the rhythms of sunlight filtering through trees, or in the powerful lines of a gnarled root. He is always researching, recording the environment, poses and habits of wild creatures with sketches, photos or films. He even collects bits of habitat, such as the piece of elephant dung he carried back from Africa. All this information proves invaluable when the time comes for Bateman to translate the accumulation of his impressions onto canvas.

Sometimes he is struck by a shape or line in an animal or the environment and carries it through a painting, playing with it, manipulating it, to create an image that surprises us and evokes a unique response to the wild. He talks about this process in a recent NFB film about him called *Images of the Wild.*

The Cape Buffalo painting is a composite of many different sources, the tree from one place, the buffalo from another. The whole thing is kind of orchestrated as a musician would compose music. The theme running through the painting is the crescent shape, it's in the curl of the buffalo's nostrils, in the sweep of his horn and in the shadow echoed in his flank. The hoofprints and scuffles are swirls of the dust and I've repeated the curve shape in the roots of the fallen tree. It's the sort of thing you'd do with music where you take a theme and play with it, manipulate it and move it around until you've come up with a whole. This is the way I like to work with my paintings, sort of orchestrating.

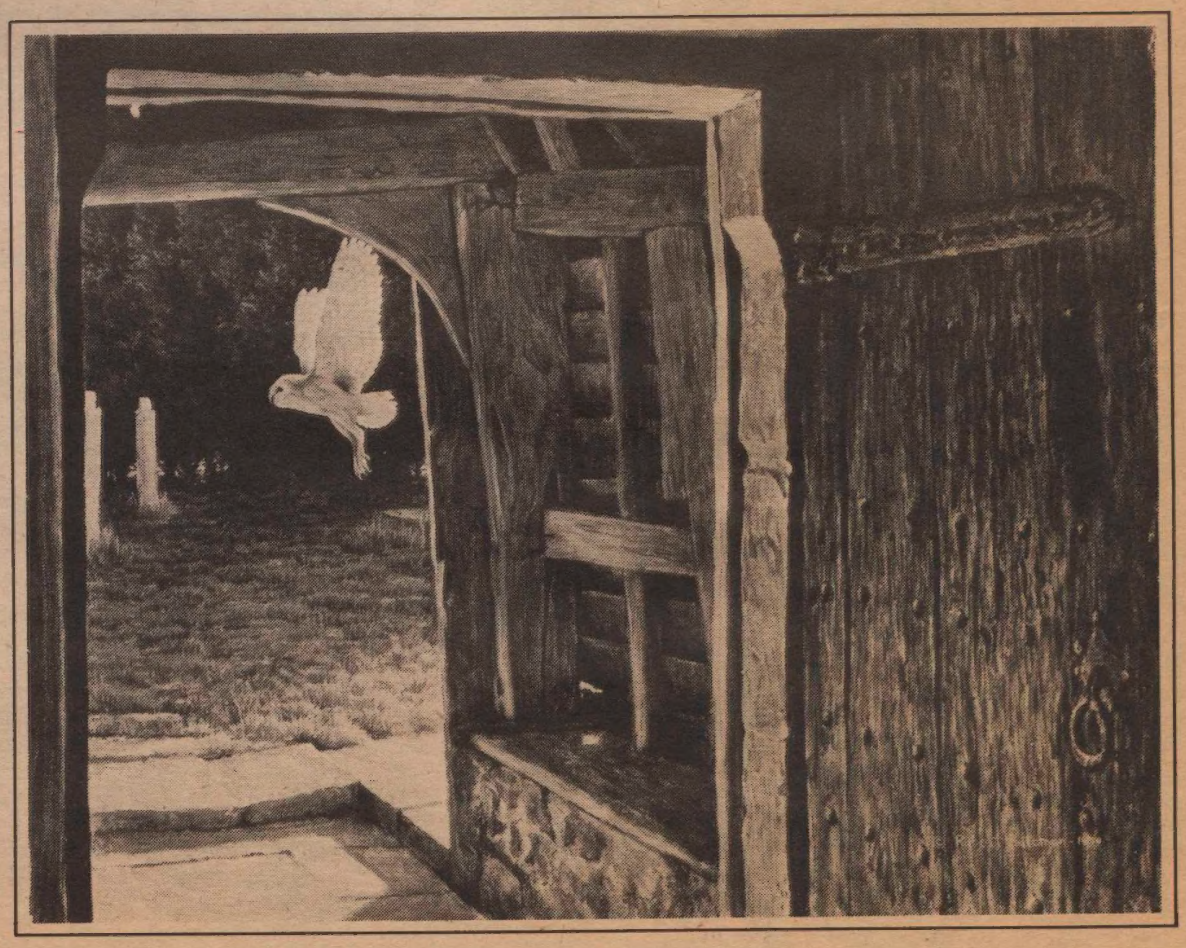
Bateman's paintings in the end are like the finest of music. They transport us to another reality, they give us a new perspective, they inspire in us a kind of awe in the majesty of the wilderness. We begin to believe once again that there is wonder in the world.

Flying High — Golden Eagle

Gentoo Penguins and Whalebones

Winter Mist — Great Horned Owl

African Amber — Lioness Pair



Barn Owl in the Churchyard

Diorama backgrounds are just one of the many ways nature artists contribute to the goals of education and conservation pursued by the National Museum of Natural Sciences. The habitat groupings on the third floor of the Museum are the work of several artists and taxidermists. Clarence Tillenius, a well-known Canadian nature artist who painted the background for the Wood Bison and Wolf, writes about his early inspiration: "The Manitoba Interlake country, when I was born there in 1913, was then newly settled wilderness. But while I was growing up, the moose, elk, wolves, and bears were being destroyed, wiped out by the settler's ready rifle, leaving only nostalgic memories of the days when their numbers were such that no one thought they could ever disappear. So while I was young, I learned that much of the fascinating world of wildlife will always be doomed to disappear with the coming of settlement by man. I grieved that it must be so, and was determined to paint pictures to convey what I felt about this wonderful world which I believed was slipping away . . . To me, painting wilderness is a way of saying that nature must be understood and protected by people if man is to survive in a civilized world". (*Nature Canada*, Canadian Artists Series, October/December, 1972).

Hints about Prints

Suppose you decide you want to bring a little wild nature into your living room, but you've never really thought about collecting art before and you know you can't afford $15,000 for an original painting by your favorite nature artist. What do you do now?

A good place to begin, if you're in the market for prints, is your local gallery. But if you're a newcomer to the world of art, you may find that the process of buying a print is even more of a challenge than deciding which artists you prefer. Suddenly you're confronted with a bewildering array of terminology that seems to defy understanding . . . and worse than that, you begin to get the uncomfortable feeling that the experts themselves don't agree. One gallery boasts that they carry only originals and that it is a waste of money to buy anything else, while another carries just the print you wanted in a limited edition signed by the artist – whatever that means. Where can you turn??

To become a knowledgeable collector of art takes time and research, but a little clarification of terms will at least start you on your way. In a handy booklet called *Prints – A Primer for the Purchaser* published by Alberta Culture Visual Arts, Bente Roed Cochran stresses that an original print is different from a reproduction of a painting because it is conceived for and produced by a duplicating process from a plate, block or stencil made by the artist. Several techniques are used to produce prints – the artist may carve the image on a woodblock and ink the raised surface to produce a woodcut; cut the image into a metal plate and force ink into the lines or grooves to produce an engraving; cut out a stencil and apply it to a mesh screen, using ink to produce a silkscreen print; or chemically treat a drawing on stone or metal to produce a lithograph. Whatever technique is used, the "originality" of the work comes from the fact that the artist works toward the print as the final expression of his or her idea. The plate, block or stencil is not an original of which copies are made, but is part of the artist's tools, just as the ink and paper are tools. In this sense there is no original as in an oil painting. Each print is an original.

Usually the artist produces a limited number of prints and then cancels or destroys the plate. You can find out how many prints are in the edition by looking in the lower left-hand corner opposite the artist's signature. A number like 21/100 indicates that 100 prints were made; if the artist was careful about numbering in sequence the 21 means it is the twenty-first print pulled.

Most printmakers are involved in all aspects of producing a print, some leave the mechanical parts to others. But regardless of whether the artist actually pulls the prints, he or she is always involved in the first few prints, or trial proofs, to approve the composition, colours, textures, etc. and make the necessary changes. While printing the edition, the printmaker also pulls a number of artist's proofs, up to 10% of the edition, which are the property of the artist. Some people value artist's proofs highly because they once belonged to the artist.

In contrast with printmakers, wildlife artists usually work in watercolours, acrylics or oils to produce the subtle colours and details of nature. The paintings they produce are originals, but many artists, who would like a wider public to enjoy their image, have these originals reproduced as prints. The prints are produced by offset lithography, photo silkscreening or other mechanical processes. In some cases, prints are reproduced in unlimited quantity, but often the edition is limited, numbered and signed by the artist; the printing materials may or may not be destroyed after a run. The signature of the artist at the bottom of the print (in pencil to show that it was not printed with the rest of the picture) usually indicates that he or she had some control over the printing and approves the quality of the work. The price of the print will reflect this.

While some critics feel that the selling of signed reproductions is really a swindle which tricks people into paying inflated prices for prints that will not appreciate in value, others argue for the democratization of art, saying it is a necessary way of bringing fine art to the public. Whatever the moral issue, as long as the technology is there people will continue to expect and demand art they like at prices they can afford.

And for the new collector who wants a few tips before entering the bewildering world of prints? There are ways to ensure that you get good quality for your money. A little research will help, but so will dealing with a reputable gallery. Get to know something about the artist you've chosen. Look at the print carefully, make sure there is no overlap in the registration of the colours, check the quality of the paper, check that the edition is limited and not too large. Compare the price of your print with other prints. Do all you can to research your purchase, and don't be afraid to ask the gallery-owner questions. In the end, the most important consideration is aesthetic – you have to buy what you like.

Artists who are interested in submitting works for Canadian Nature Art exhibitions should send their name and address to:

Canadian Nature Federation
75 Albert Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 6G1

Glossary of Print Terms

Relief prints The oldest method of printing includes woodcuts, wood engravings and linocuts. In this process, the artist cuts away from a block of rigid material all the portions of his or her design that are not to be printed. The raised surface is inked, paper is laid over it, and the print is made by applying pressure. The printed image is the reverse of the original drawing on the block.

Woodcut The artist draws the design on a flat block of wood which is usually cut from the side grain of the tree. The cutter or artist uses a gouge or sharp knife to cut away everything but the lines and areas of the image, so that the design stands in relief.

Linocut A linocut is made from a block of linoleum in the same manner as a woodcut. It has less texture than a woodcut because of the homogeneous nature of linoleum. This method is often used by students because it is inexpensive and relatively easy to do.

Wood engraving A wood engraving is made from a block of hard wood that is cut from a cross-section of the tree. In a wood engraving, it is the drawing on the block rather than the surrounding area that is cut away and scooped out. When the surface of the block is inked and transferred to a sheet, it produces white lines on a black background.

Intaglio prints In an intaglio print the image is cut into the surface of a metal plate (usually copper or zinc). Ink is then forced into the grooves and the surface of the plate is wiped clean. When the plate and dampened paper are put in a press under extreme pressure, the paper is forced into the grooves and picks up the image. Engravings, etchings, drypoints, mezzotints and aquatints are all intaglio prints.

Engraving The image is cut into the plate with a sharply pointed instrument called a burin or graver. The rough edges that are produced when the burin "ploughs" through the plate are then burnished off, leaving the image in sharp, clean lines.

Etching The plate is first covered with a waxy, acid-resistant substance. The artist then draws his or her design into this resinous ground with a finely pointed needle, exposing the surface of the copper. The plate is immersed in an acid bath which eats into the areas of the plate that are not protected by the ground. When the lines are the desired depth and width, the plate is removed and a solvent is applied to clean the plate of ground and provide a clean surface for inking.

Drypoint This is a modification of engraving in which the artist uses a steel needle or a diamond point to scratch the design onto a metal plate. Because the curl or burr is not removed as it is in an engraving, these metal shavings hold the ink and create deep velvety lines when printed.

Mezzotint In a mezzotint the entire surface of the copper plate is pitted or roughened with tiny indentations by means of a serrated tool called a rocker. The image is then created by flattening or pressing the copper back to a smooth surface in appropriate places. When ink is applied these surfaces print white because there are no indentations to hold the ink. This is a tonal process related to engraving.

Aquatint Aquatint is related to etching but is concerned with areas of tone rather than line. The plate is dusted with powdered ashphalt that is then melted over heat. The melted asphalt protects the plate when it is immersed in acid – only the areas exposed between the asphalt particles are bitten. The longer the biting the darker the tonal areas will print.

Stencil prints The image is created from open space in a cut or shaped form which will allow ink or paint to pass through. An example of a stencil technique is silkscreen printing or serigraphy.

Silkscreen The artist cuts a master stencil and attaches it to a screen which is a piece of silk or synthetic open-mesh textile stretched over a wooden frame. A sheet of paper is then placed below the screen and silkscreen ink, thick oil or tempera paint is forced through the uncovered areas of fabric onto the paper by means of a squeegee.

Planographic prints This technique does not rely on raised or carved printing surfaces. The artist treats the surface of a stone or plate chemically rather than dimensionally to prepare it for printing. The most important example is lithography.

Lithography Invented in the late 18th century, this technique relies on the natural antipathy of grease and water. The artist draws an image on a stone or on a specially treated zinc or aluminum plate with a greasy crayon or a greasy liquid ink called tusche. The stone or plate is then chemically treated to make the non-image part of it repellent to ink and the image part of it repellent to water. The stone is kept wet during printing, and ink is applied with a roller. The greasy areas which represent the image attract the greasy printing ink and repel the water, while the other areas remain wet and ink-resistant. After inking, the stone is covered with a sheet of dampened paper and run through a press. The printed image reverses the composition as drawn on the stone.

Offset lithography This technique applies the principles of lithography to commercial and quantity production. An image is photographed onto a zinc plate through a screen and large numbers of prints are produced using an offset printing machine. In offset printing the inked image from the zinc plate is printed on a rubber blanket or roller which in turn transfers it onto a sheet or roll of paper. The final print is made up of thousands of tiny dots which can be seen through a magnifying glass.